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ABSTRACT

This report examines data from an analysis of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program in 2001 and previous years that examined grade-by-grade enrollment of participating students by school. It notes that after 5 years, the Program has not made low-income, African American students attending Cleveland's struggling public schools its top priority. The voucher program has always consisted primarily of students attending religious schools, and in 2001, more than 99 percent of participating students were enrolled in religious schools. Only 21 percent of students receiving aid through the voucher program attended Cleveland public schools in the year prior to enrollment in the voucher program. Public schools that are losing high numbers of students to voucher schools are not among the low-performing city schools. Students who transfer out of public schools to enroll in voucher schools are more likely to have come from high-performing schools, magnet schools, or schools with high test scores. Students in the voucher program are less likely to be African American than students in the district at large. Voucher students come from households with similar income levels to those of households of students in the Cleveland public schools. (SM)

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A REPORT FROM

POLICY MATTERS OHIO

CLEVELAND SCHOOL VOUCHERS: WHERE THE STUDENTS GO

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JANUARY, 2002

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Cleveland School Vouchers: Where the Students Go

The United States Supreme Court is poised to begin hearing oral arguments on the Cleveland school voucher case on February 20th. Arguments will center on the constitutionality of the program in what the *Christian Science Monitor* called "a potential landmark church-state ruling … that could change the face of American education (and) substantially alter the relationship between government and organized religion in the U.S.[1]" The Supreme Court will review a U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals' December 2000 ruling, which found that the Cleveland program violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that mandates separation of church and state. Analysts agree that the Supreme Court is likely to be split 5-4 on the issue, with Sandra Day O'Connor the deciding vote.

Part of the appeals court's rationale for striking down the program was that it offered extremely limited choice beyond religious schools. Since the ruling, our analysis shows both the number of non-religious schools in the program and the proportion of students enrolled in non-religious schools declined. As of mid-December 2001, just over half of one percent of voucher students, 25 pupils in all, were attending non-religious schools. This new data bolsters the concerns of constitutional scholars that the program violates the Establishment Clause.

Policy Matters Ohio analyzed Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program[2] data from December 13th 2001 and previous years on grade-by-grade enrollment of participating students by school. The voucher program has always consisted primarily of students attending religious schools, the majority of which have been Catholic[3]. In this school year, the proportion of students in non-religious schools has become smaller than ever.

Background

The Cleveland school voucher program, begun in 1996-97, provides parents of students enrolled in one of 50 participating private schools with a voucher worth either $1875 or $2250 depending on family income, to be used toward tuition. The overall tuition charged may not exceed $2500. Families with income below 200 percent of the poverty level receive 90 percent of tuition, while those with income above that level receive 75 percent of tuition. In the program's first year, students in Kindergarten through third grade could participate. The grades of enrollment have expanded in each subsequent year and the program now includes students in Kindergarten through eighth grade.

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[1] Richey, Warren, "Court to take on thorny issue of school vouchers" *The Christian Science Monitor* September 26, 2001, page 2.

[2] The name of the Cleveland voucher program's office.

[3] The independent newspaper *Catalyst: For Cleveland Schools* counted 37 Catholic schools, seven other Christian denominations (not including Holy Rosary) and two Islamic schools.

The Cleveland voucher program was the first in the nation to provide public money for private, religious school tuition. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the site of the country's first voucher program, did not originally include religious schools. Although all non-public schools within the boundaries of the Cleveland Municipal Schools District and all public schools surrounding Cleveland are eligible to apply for the program, no adjacent public school districts have opted to take part and only three non-religious schools are currently participating.

Shrinking Secular Participation

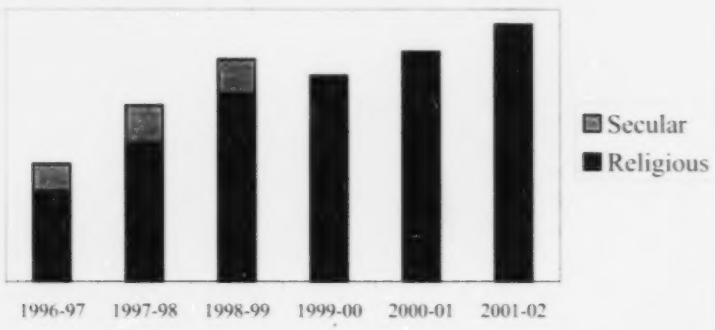
In the program's first year – 1996-97 – 76.8 percent of participating pupils attended religious schools. Since then, the proportion attending religious schools has risen steadily, to 79.1 percent in 1997-98; 84.9 percent in 1998-99; 99.0 percent in 1999-2000; and 99.4 percent in both 2000-01 and 2001-02[4]. Just over half of one percent of participating students attended non-religious schools in the last two years of the program. This year, only twenty-five students out of more than 4200 in the program attend non-sectarian schools. More than half of these go to Birchwood Elementary, which some observers might also label a religious school.[5]

The program has simultaneously more than doubled its size, from a total of 1943 students in its first year to 4202 students this school year, according to the December 13th data. The twenty-five non-religious school participants this year is down from a total 609 non-religious students at the peak of secular enrollment in 1997-98. Figure 1 depicts the decline in non-religious enrollment in the program. The non-religious student population, less than one percent in each of the last three years, is barely visible.

[4] Enrollment varies throughout the school year as students transfer in and out of schools. All data on participating schools was based on reports issued by the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program and produced during or after each school year in question. The data for 1996-97 was based on a report issued February 14th 1997, for 1997-98 on a report issued June 29th 1998, for 1998-99 on one issued June 2nd 1999, for 1999-2000 on one issued November 20th 2001, for 2000-2001 on one issued June 22nd 2001, and for 2001-2002 on one issued December 13th 2001.

[5] The Program no longer tracks whether participating schools are religious. In the past, both Holy Rosary Montessori and Birchwood Elementary Schools have been considered non-sectarian by the Program. However, staff answering the phone at Holy Rosary said that the school, while not affiliated with a parish, uses the "Good Shepherd" program and "meets the needs of Catholic families." Staff answering at Birchwood said that "the teachers are Christians and we emphasize and uphold Christian morals and ethics in school. We pay a lot of attention to character building, but we don't offer formal religion classes." Based on these answers, Policy Matters characterizes Holy Rosary as religious in this analysis, and Birchwood as non-religious, despite feeling that we could probably safely designate the latter as religious.

Figure 1: Cleveland School Voucher Program:
Enrollment by School Type, 1996-2001



Source: Policy Matters analysis of Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program Data

The proportion of secular school enrollment has dropped every year of the program (including this year, when it went from .61 percent to .59 percent, both rounded to .6 percent). However, the largest drops in secular school enrollment occurred as a 5.7 percentage point decline between 1997-98 and 1998-99; and as a 14.1 percentage point decline between 1998-99 and 1999-2000. The sharp 14.1 percentage point decline took place the year the Hope schools and the Marotta Montessori schools left the voucher program.

There were eight secular schools involved in the program's first year– Birchwood, Hanna Perkins, Hope Central Academy, Hope Ohio City, Marotta Montessori at three locations (Carl B. Stokes, Fruitland and Glenville), and Ministerial Head Start (non-religious, despite the name). The number of participating secular schools actually grew over the next two years, despite the decrease in students at secular schools. In recent years, however, the Hope schools, the Marotta Montessori schools, and other single-location schools left the program, leaving only three non-sectarian schools remaining in the last two school years.[6]

Remaining Secular Schools

The remaining schools in the program considered to be non-religious are Birchwood Elementary School, the Hanna Perkins School, and Covenant Kindergarten School, which is non-sectarian despite its name. Currently, Birchwood Elementary has between one and four voucher pupils in all elementary grades through grade eight, with the exception of kindergarten and fourth grade. Covenant has nine first-grade pupils enrolled

[6] In June 1998, the state of Ohio signed contracts to turn the Hope Schools into charter schools, leading them to leave the voucher program. As charter schools, the Hope Schools can receive up to $4300 for each non-special needs pupil and will remain independent of many standards to which public schools are held. However, the schools must not be affiliated with any religion. The Marotta Montessori schools closed down amid reported financial difficulties.

this year. Hanna Perkins has one kindergarten and one first grade student from the voucher program this year. Essentially, then, for those beyond kindergarten and first grade, Birchwood Elementary is the primary option for participation in a non-sectarian voucher school. As stated earlier, there is a reasonable basis for saying Birchwood's program promotes Christianity, but it is not affiliated with any particular denomination. In the fourth grade, there are currently no voucher students enrolled in a non-religious school (including Birchwood). Table 1 lists the secular schools participating in the voucher program for each year since the program began.

Table 1: Secular Schools Participating in the Cleveland School Voucher Program

1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02
1. Birchwood	1. Birchwood	1. Birchwood	1. Birchwood	1. Birchwood	1. Birchwood
2. Hanna Perkins	2. Covenant Kindergarten	2. Covenant	2. Covenant	2. Covenant	2. Covenant
3. Hope Central	3. Hanna Perkins	3. Hanna Perkins	3. Hanna Perkins	3. Hanna Perkins	3. Hanna Perkins
4. Hope OH City	4. Hope Central	4. Hope Central	4. Ministerial Superior		
5. Marotta Montessori (MM) Carl Stokes	5. Hope Tremont	5. Hope Tremont			
6. MM Fruitland	6. Hough Academy for Higher Learning	6. Lewis Little Folks			
7. MM Glenville	7. MM Stokes	7. MM Stokes			
8. Ministerial Head Start	8. MM Fruitland	8. MM Fruitland			
	9. MM Glenville	9. MM Glenville			
	10. Ministerial Head Start	10. Ministerial Bracklan			
		11. Ministerial Superior			

Source: Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program data

Where the Students Come From

Previous research by Zach Schiller at Policy Matters Ohio found that only 21 percent of students receiving aid through the Cleveland voucher program had attended Cleveland public schools in the year prior to enrollment in the voucher program[7]. Nearly one-third of students in the program had previously been attending private schools. The remaining 46 percent enrolled in the program as kindergartners or came from outside of Cleveland.

Catalyst: For Cleveland Schools, an education newspaper, examined the ten public schools that have each lost more than 17 students to voucher schools according to Schiller's research. The *Catalyst* examination found these ten schools were more likely to have test scores above the district average and sometimes above the state average, to be magnet schools with specialized programming, and to be rated as one of the district's empowered schools based on high academic achievement[8]. None of the ten schools that lost the greatest number of students to voucher schools were among the low-performing city schools labeled CEO schools.

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[7] *Cleveland School Vouchers: Where the Students Come From*, Zach Schiller, September 2001. Available on the web at http://www.policymattersohio.org/voucherintro.html.

[8] Scott, Caitlin, "Better district schools lose students to vouchers," *Catalyst: For Cleveland Schools*, December, 2001.

Who the Students Are

Students in the voucher program, in addition to being more likely to come from private schools or from higher-performing public schools, are less likely to be African-American than students in the district at large[9]. Just 53 percent of Cleveland voucher students were African-American in this school year, while 71 percent of Cleveland Municipal School District students last year were African American, according to a separate analysis by *Catalyst* and the Northern Ohio Data and Information Service at Cleveland State University's Levin College of Urban Affairs.

Voucher students come from households with similar income levels to households of students in the Cleveland public schools according to a 1999 study by the Indiana Center for Evaluation, which found that the average family income of voucher students was $18,750 while the average family income for public school students was $19,814[10]. A 2001 survey by the same researcher found no significant income differences between voucher and public school students.

Summary

The pilot experiment with school vouchers in Cleveland was touted as the surest and quickest way to improve education of inner-city children in troubled public schools. Proponents explicitly denied the suggestion that it would primarily aid those already in private schools. Instead, they argued that it would spur competition and provide a variety of choices.

After five years, however, the program has not made low-income, African American students attending Cleveland's struggling public schools its top priority. And nearly the only option the program now provides is for religious education. To summarize:

- More than 99 percent of students participating in Cleveland's voucher program are enrolled in religious schools. That percentage has steadily increased since the program's first year when 76.8 percent of participants were in religious schools.
- The number of non-religious schools participating in the program has declined from eleven at its peak in 1998-99 to just three in this school year.
- Only one in five voucher students attended Cleveland public schools in the year prior to enrolling in the program.
- One in three participants already attended private school in the year prior to enrolling in the program.
- Those students who transferred out of the public schools to enroll in voucher schools were more likely to have come from a high-performing school, a

[9] Van Lier, Piet and Caitlin Scott, "Fewer choices, longer commutes for black voucher students", Catalyst: For Cleveland Schools, October 2001.
[10] Metcalf, Kim, Indiana Center for Evaluation.

magnet school, or a school with test scores that exceeded the district average.

- Program participants are substantially less likely to be African-American than students in the Cleveland public schools. While last year 71 percent of district students were black, this year only 53 percent of voucher students were black.
- Program participants had an average income slightly lower than that of Cleveland public school students in 1999 and not significantly different in 2001.

Quite apart from the complicated achievement issues involved in comparing experimental school programs, it is important for policymakers to consider whether the Cleveland school voucher program is fulfilling the primary goals set out for it. Understanding who the students are, where they previously attended school, and where they are currently enrolled is an important component of assessing program success.